

Cyber-Bullying Tips

These are simple, although sometimes challenging, things you can do.

by Mark Binder



For Kids... Protect yourself

- Don't "friend" anyone you don't know.
- Don't give out your phone number. (People can't text you without your number.)
- Block unwanted posts, texts and phone calls.
- Keep your password secret. Don't tell anyone. Don't let them look over your shoulder when you type.
- Set the privacy levels high on your wall and your postings.
- Don't post anything you wouldn't want your favorite grandmother to see. The Internet stores everything, possibly forever. Even if you delete something, it could be copied and reposted, and it probably will be.
- Don't share a secret online. It's hard enough for friends to keep secrets face to face. Online, it's much easier to spread news.
- Don't meet face to face with anyone who you met online.
- Never ever let someone take your picture or video you in a compromising position.

If you are cyber-bullied...

- Don't open or read the messages. This will be challenging to do.
- Don't reply or even answer back.
- Don't take it personally. This will be next to impossible to do. The old rhyme, "Sticks and Stones" isn't true. While words don't physically damage, they do hurt — unless you are truly able to let them go.
- Consider your options:
 - Let it go
 - Ignore it, even if it hurts
 - Attack back (often won't work, and may make it worse)
 - Report
- Don't let the bully win. Bullies enjoy dominating other people. They feel bigger and more powerful by making others look weak or bad. Stand centered in yourself. If you don't know what this means, look for a teacher of meditation, yoga, martial arts, or any long-term mind-body practice.

Report a cyber-bully...

- It may be difficult to talk to an adult. Do it anyway.
- If they ignore you, look for another adult. School officials and counselors may be able to point you in the right direction.
- Report cyber-bullying or unwanted messages to the social network, phone company or Internet Service Provider.
- If someone threatens to harm you, notify the police.
- Don't open or read the messages. This will be challenging.
- Don't delete the messages right away. Show them to the adult. Keeping them active may allow you to trace the bully. Print them out if you must delete them.

Avoid being a cyber-bully...

- Be nice to people.
- If you're mad about something, don't send a reply right away. Write it down and save it as a draft. You don't have to take back something that is never sent.

- If you don't like someone or something, you don't have to tell the world.
- Saracasm, snideness and snarky comments can be fun, but may be taken as real criticism or attacks. On the Internet, no one can see your facial expressions or tone of voice.
- Don't use foul language. Swearing and using curses may be a kind of sneaky pleasure, but they do tend to stunt the development of deeper-level thinking and language. Also, it may be against the law or violate the terms of your Internet service, which means they could sue you or cut you off.
- Never post or tag a photo or video of someone without their permission.
- If you see someone insulting or hurting someone else, don't jump in. Don't agree. How would you feel if they did that to you?

For parents...

- Talk with your children. Keep an eye on them. If there is a sudden change of behavior (they stop talking, begin sleeping a lot, spend more time in bathroom), ask them what happened.
- Trust your child, and verify.
- Consider using filters and blocks on the home networks.
- Monitor their computer. Require them to friend you and give you their passwords and unblock you from any online social networks.
- If they suddenly close windows or sleep their machines when you look ask them to reopen it.
- Check their histories. Know that they can delete this. Know that you can actually set your router to monitor traffic.
- Know that they will hate this, and find ways around it. Part of growing up is to find freedom whenever possible. Kids will almost always be able to dodge your control.
- Be aware that kids may not take things as personally as you would. This is their media and way of communicating. It is new to us, but they are growing up with it as the norm.
- Downgrade their phone if you see a problem. Restrict their Internet access. Turn off the router. There is no "right" to texting or the Internet. (Not yet, anyway.)

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